

Funding Guidelines and Ranking Criteria for the CVP Conservation Program (CVPCP) and CVPIA Habitat Restoration Program (HRP)–September 2006

I. Introduction

This document provides a brief description and explanation of funding guidelines and ranking criteria used during evaluation of proposals being considered for funding by the CVPCP and the HRP. Proposals are considered under a single evaluation process for both Programs.

These priorities and criteria grew out of several of the Service's and Reclamation's programs that began planning work and implementing the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) prior to 1995. They include the concerns and priorities that have developed from the implementation of the Friant Biological Opinion in 1992, and Biological Opinions related to CVP contract renewals and Reclamation's Operation Criteria and Plan (OCAP). They further reflect the concerns that have been communicated to the CVPCP and HRP's Technical Team by the management of the offices of the Fish and Wildlife Service (Endangered Species Division), Bureau of Reclamation, and California Department of Fish and Game.

II. General Considerations

The description of guidelines and criteria presented in this write-up are implemented in the context of general considerations of the CVPCP/HRP Technical Team and Program Managers, which can influence final decisions regarding funding. These considerations include:

1.) Proposals are grouped into four categories. These categories reflect the Programs' emphasis on certain kinds of activities considered more effective and critical to species' protection and recovery than others. Accordingly, program funds are applied to proposals in the following order of priority (however, fee title/easement acquisition and habitat restoration projects have equal priorities):

(A) Fee Title/Easement Acquisition: Protection of species or existing habitats impacted by the CVP through the purchase of fee title or conservation easements.

(B) Habitat Restoration: Protection of species or existing habitats impacted by the CVP through restoration of CVP-impacted habitats.

(C) Studies/Surveys: Research addressing status, habitat needs, and behavior of CVP-impacted species.

(D) Outreach/Planning/Other: Public outreach and education, formulation of land management plans, and other activities.

2.) Actions funded by the CVPCP/HRP are opportunity driven. Funding decisions are often dependent on the number and scope of proposals received in given year.

3.) The past performance of an applicant is considered during project selection. Poor performance during implementation of past grant agreements might weigh against further funding.

4.) Project feasibility is considered during proposal selection. Program managers conclude whether a project will result in real benefits to species in a cost-effective manner before making funding decisions.

III. Proposal Ranking Criteria

Proposals received by the CVPCP and HRP are placed into the four project categories specified in Section II. Some or all of the criteria described below are applied to those categories, but no other criteria, other than those listed below, are used.

(A) LAND ACQUISITION (Easement and/or Fee Title) PROJECTS

CVP Nexus

The criteria considers whether a “nexus” exists between the project proposal and the CVP. Generally a nexus is determined based on two factors:

- 1.) Will benefits to a CVP-affected species or resource occur within a CVP contract service area, or in an area where CVP water is delivered following water transfer of sale?
- 2.) Is there a strong linkage between an affected habitat and/or species (i.e., vernal pools) and the CVP? This would allow, in some cases, for a project area to exist outside a CVP Service Area as long this linkage between habitat and/or species exists.

This factor is valuable to Reclamation because it provides a higher level of assurance to water users that the conservation needs of resources affected by their district are being addressed in proportion to their share in water surcharge contributions, and thereby serving to make future formal Section 7 consultations easier for actions needed in their district.

It is important to bear in mind that opportunities to most cost-effectively recover a species may not all be found within water districts, but, at the same time, there are recovery actions specifically identified within the CVP service area that should get preference when there are willing sellers or the conditions necessary to move forward are otherwise suitable for implementation of such tasks, and other considerations are equally beneficial to the resource.

Program Priority

This criterion addresses a proposal’s relationship to the annual priorities of the CVPCP/HRP, in terms of habitats, species and geographic area identified and ranked for a given year. Each year the Programs establish these priorities based on past expenditures and existing needs. A proposal that address needs within these priorities will be ranked accordingly, with proposals in higher priority categories receiving more points than those in lower priority areas. Priorities are indicated in the Programs’ annual proposal solicitation letter.

Federally Listed Species Benefits

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have specific benefits to species that are currently Federally listed, as opposed to proposals with broader ecological benefits. **Under this criterion, species that are designated as “Proposed” for Federal listing are given the same status as those currently listed.**

The criterion asks the following question: Does the proposal provide a major, moderate, or minimal benefit to Federally listed species that have been impacted by the CVP?

While considering this criterion, the Programs’ Technical Team will consult existing Recovery Plans to determine whether an action within a proposal can be correlated with Recovery Plan tasks. This correlation can be used as a tool for determining the scale of benefit that would result from implementation of the proposal.

Additionally, when determining this ranking, reviewers keep in mind that immediacy of threat to a species and the degree of urgency associated with a project, is considered under a separate criteria (“Project Urgency.”)

General guidance and examples of major, moderate, and minimal benefits are as follows:

For fee title and easement acquisitions, a **major** benefit to Federally listed species would result when the land that is acquired consists of the following attributes: Land is in relatively pristine condition and does not need to be restored (e.g., has not been previously degraded or contaminated by previous land uses and is not dominated by exotic species); land is utilized by numerous Federally listed species; land is comprised of designated critical habitat; and land is not subject to disturbance from adjacent lands (e.g., noise from developed areas, agricultural activities, etc.).

A **moderate** benefit to Federally listed species would result when the land that is acquired consists of the following attributes: Land is not in pristine condition, needs little restoration, and has not been severely degraded; land is utilized by a moderate number of Federally listed species; land may or may not be comprised of designated critical habitat; and land is subject to minimal to very moderate disturbance from adjacent lands.

A **minimal** benefit to Federally listed species would result when the land that is acquired consists of the following attributes: Land is not pristine and needs moderate to major restoration to address degradation; land is utilized by very few Federally listed species; land is not comprised of designated critical habitat; and land is subject to moderate to high disturbance from adjacent lands.

State Listed Species

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have benefits to State listed species (including “Rare” designation), in addition to any other kind of ecological benefit. Guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” is used to rank this criterion.

Target Species Benefits

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have benefits to other species besides those that are Federally listed (or Proposed for listing). These include: Federally designated Candidate species and Federally and State designated Species of Special Concern. Guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” is used to rank this criterion.

Habitat/Bio-Diversity

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have benefits to ecosystems that currently support a habitat matrix composed of habitat components that complement each other. These components increase their value in conserving native species beyond what each habitat would do separately, as opposed to projects that would not have that kind of benefit. For example, an acquisition project directed at protecting a variety of vegetative cover types, would receive a higher ranking than one that is focused on one in particular. This criterion is also used to distinguish between projects that have benefits to ecosystems that currently support a large proportion of the native species expected in the habitats to be benefited, particularly in habitats that have greatly declined elsewhere, in addition to other kinds of ecological benefit. It relates to the array of native species on the proposal's project site, and is not limited to listed species. It can apply to proposals that would protect a diverse area and/or increase diversity through restoration. **The key question here is: "Will the proposal benefit or maintain a broad range of native species and habitats, or is it directed at just a few?"** This ranking criterion is not applicable to Study/Survey proposals, since these projects tend to focus on specific habitats related to a particular species.

Cumulative Benefit

This criterion considers a project's impact on species/habitats in relation to the collective influence of other on-going or planned activities related to those species and habitats.

An example of a **major** benefit would be a land acquisition project that is part of a larger strategy for a species recovery, such as providing habitat for a species' reintroduction or research. An example of a **moderate** benefit would be one in which changes in land use (e.g. grazing), resulting from the acquisition, would provide moderate benefits for listed species. Another might be one in which some modest, but not comprehensive, restoration work occurs over a number of years. A proposal with **minimal** cumulative benefits would be one in which the proposed action is isolated from other conservation activities, such as a land acquisition in which no restoration or research is planned and the property is not located in areas critical to meeting the species needs (i.e., habitat used incidentally for foraging).

Long-term Benefit

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have benefits that are expected to continue in perpetuity, as opposed to projects that address an immediate problem, but will

become superfluous to the conservation of Central Valley ecosystems and native species due to later projects and conservation measures.

An example of a **major** benefit would be a project in which the property would be preserved intact and in perpetuity, and where the protected properties have “potential” for supporting additional species. An example of a **moderate to minimal** ranking might be a project in which properties may still be influenced directly or indirectly by future development.

Project Site Connectivity

This criterion is used to distinguish between projects that have synergistic benefits because they benefit habitats that are in proximity to other protected areas, rather than those that are isolated and diminished in value because of that isolation. This criterion applies only to the Acquisition and Restoration categories since these projects relate to actual project sites and locations. This criterion is related to “Cumulative Benefit” but is specific to project location, and does not consider other collective influences on the project’s overall impact and effectiveness.

A **major** benefit would result when a project is contiguous to other protected lands and would contribute to securing needed corridors or spatial requirements of species. A **moderate** benefit would result when properties are nearby, but these properties do not represent a continuous band of protected lands. A **minimal** benefit would result if the project property is isolated from other conservation lands.

Partners

This criterion distinguishes projects where there will be contributions of cash or in-kind services toward the total cost of the project. Project proponents must specify the source and level of other contributions. This criterion also allows for past contributions to the overall objective of a project. For example, if a proposal seeks funds for the last phase (i.e., maintenance) of a riparian restoration project, funding of earlier phases would be counted when determining partnering levels. It should be noted, however, that failure to secure funds from other specified sources may jeopardize delivery of funds under a CVPCP/HRP grant agreement.

Level of CVP Impacts

This criterion measures and assesses to what extent a species or ecosystem has been affected by the Central Valley Project. It includes direct, indirect, interdependent, and interrelated effects. Species and habitats affected to a larger extent by the CVP than others, will be given more points. The criteria works in conjunction with the “Program Priorities” section but is ranked separately since priorities are also based on level of past expenditures. The Technical Team will evaluate whether the species/habitats benefited by the proposed project have been identified as “high” impact, “medium” impact and “low” impact as related to construction and operation of the CVP. Projects that would rank high for CVP impacts would be those that include habitat types and their associated species that have been the most directly and significantly impacted by the CVP.

A table created for the “Draft Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report for the CVPIA Interim Contract Renewals” (Fish and Wildlife Service, 2004) identified habitat types and historical differences in acres (i.e., trend analysis from 1945 to 1990) for impacts associated with the CVP. Some CVP impacted species overlap these habitat types. The Technical Team will use this data as a general guide when discussing this criteria, but will consider project location (physical connection to CVP facilities and place of use) in relation to the CVP when determining a final ranking. For example, a riparian restoration project on the perimeter of the CVPCP/HRP project area, may not get as high a ranking as one directly adjacent to a CVP facility or within a CVP Service area, even though riparian habitats were significantly impacted by the CVP.

Considering these factors, therefore, proposals will be given a **major** rating if species/habitats being addressed within a project area have been significantly impacted by the CVP, and the project site is within a CVP Service Area or historical place of use. A proposal would receive a **moderate** rating if significantly impacted species are outside a CVP Service Area or historical place of use. Proposals addressing species/habitats not significantly affected by the CVP and on a project site outside a CVP use area, would receive a **minimal** rating.

Project Urgency

The purpose of this criterion is to evaluate and assign a scale of urgency to an action, based on: 1) the level of endangerment of a species addressed in a proposal and 2) the resulting threat to species should the action not be carried out. During proposal evaluation, the Technical Team will ask the question “How badly do we need to do this project?” in the context of the overall goals of the CVPCP and HRP.

Examples of a proposal receiving a **major** ranking might be a land acquisition in which the parcel in question supports Federally listed, CVP-impacted species but is under the immediate threat of development; or a proposal in which an action (in either of the four categories) addresses the needs of a species threatened with extinction (critically endangered) unless effective recovery actions (contained in the proposal) are not carried out.

Technical Merit and Completeness of Proposal

Proposals will be ranked for completeness and accuracy. The Technical Team will consider how well the objectives and methods are explained, whether backup documentation is complete and detailed, quality of maps and tables, and how well the proposal addresses the ranking criteria. Research proposal will also be peer reviewed for technical adequacy.

Acres

No ranking is applied. This criterion specifies amount of acres applicable to a proposed acquisition or restoration project.

CP/HRP Cost

No ranking is applied to this criterion, but the information is used to evaluate the relative amount of cost-share contributions to be provided by partners.

Total Cost

No ranking is applied to this criterion, but the information is used to evaluate the relative amount of cost-share contributions to be provided by partners.

Total Points

This sums all points received for a particular proposal in a particular category. Total points are evaluated in the context of General Considerations, as specified in Section II.

(B) RESTORATION PROJECTS

CVP Nexus

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Program Priority

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Federally Listed Species Benefits

For restoration projects, a **major** benefit would result when the reviewers determine that the restoration action has the potential to markedly raise baseline for one or more Federally listed, CVP-impacted species. Examples include creating new and substantial areas of giant garter snake or California red-legged frog habitat in areas that will be readily colonized by the species, or a captive breeding (riparian brush rabbit) or a seed banking program, etc. A **moderate** benefit may be a general habitat restoration project that has some real but not significant benefits to listed species due to the scale and size of the restoration component focused on Federally listed species; an example might be a project in which new permanent water areas for garter snake are created, but the additional habitat is considered only a moderate increase due to other limiting factors on the project site. A project with **minimal** benefits might be a restoration project where there are only ancillary benefits to one or more Federally listed species, but these benefits are not the main intent of the restoration project (i.e., a wetland restoration project in which minimal/marginal garter snake habitat is created while mainly enhancing conditions for waterfowl, or a riparian project where elderberry will be planted but in areas and at certain densities where it is unlikely to result in VELB colonization).

State Listed Species

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Target Species Benefits

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Habitat/Bio-Diversity

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Cumulative Benefit

An example of projects with **major** cumulative values would be a restoration project that is part of a larger strategy for a species recovery, such as providing habitat for a species’ reintroduction or research. An example of a **moderate** benefit might be a fencing project done in conjunction with other land management activities designed to improve conditions for species unless a proposal clearly identified a major benefit through such action. A proposal with **minimal** cumulative benefits would be one in which the proposed action is isolated from other conservation activities, such as a restoration project that is not located in an area critical to meeting the species needs (i.e., habitat used incidentally for foraging).

Long-term Benefit

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Project Site Connectivity

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Partners

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Level of CVP Impacts

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Project Urgency

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Technical Merit and Completeness of Proposal

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion

Acres

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

CP/HRP Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Points

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

(C) STUDIES/SURVEYSCVP Nexus

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Program Priority

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Federally Listed Species Benefits

For study and survey proposals, a **major** benefit would result if the Technical Team determines that the proposed work provides data that contributes significantly to a species recovery, such as a genetic or behavioral study in which data is used for Federally listed species reintroduction, a survey or study that results in changes in the listing status of a species, or a survey where additional populations of individuals are identified where they were once believed to be extirpated. A **moderate** benefit could result if a study or survey provides moderately useful information contributing to recovery, such as new baseline information regarding a species status or distribution. A project with **minimal** benefits would be one in which data obtained might only supplement a large body of preexisting information about a species.

State Listed Species

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Target Species Benefits

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Cumulative Benefit

An example of a project with **major** cumulative values would be a study/survey that works in concert with other on-going research directed at a particular species, such as genetics study on California red-legged frog that may provide important information related to reintroducing the species into certain locations. An example of a **moderate** benefit might be a species survey that supplements and enhances relatively current information but does not provide new information considered critical to a species’ recovery (e.g. presence or absence of species on newly restored riparian areas). A proposal with **minimal** cumulative benefits would be a project such as a species’ inventory in an area generally not seen as an important geographic area for the species and has, therefore, not been emphasized in previous work (e.g. CA red-legged frog surveys in watersheds where frog populations are assumed not to exist).

Long-term Benefit

An example of a **major** benefit survey/study, might be a vernal pool plant association study which would facilitate and better define mitigation standards for vernal pools. An example of a **moderate to low** ranking might be a resource assessment or population survey that only supplements or reinforces existing data but does not provide significant new information related to the long term sustainability of a population (i.e., use of hair samples to assess distribution and abundance of kit fox).

Partners

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Level of CVP Impacts

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Project Urgency

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Technical Merit and Completeness of Proposal

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion

CP/HRP Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Points

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

(D) OUTREACH/PLANNING/OTHER PROJECTS

CVP Nexus

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Program Priority

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Federally Listed Species Benefits

Proposals are ranked based on the scope and effectiveness of a planning or outreach project. A **major** benefit would be a planning effort that addresses numerous listed species and identifies significant land use changes or restoration efforts that have the potential to significantly improve conditions for species over the long term. An extensive outreach project that addresses numerous species, or focuses effectively on critically endangered species, would also receive a **major** ranking. A **moderate** benefit would be applied to a planning effort in which only modest changes to land uses and/or minimal restoration efforts are outlined. Outreach projects that are limited in scope (# of species and public contact) would receive a **moderate** ranking. A **minimal** ranking would be applied to planning and outreach efforts that address few, if any, listed species and that are so limited in scope no real benefits would be realized over the long term.

State Listed Species

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Target Species Benefits

Use guidance for “Federally Listed Species Benefits” in this category to rank this criterion.

Habitat/Bio-Diversity

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Cumulative Benefit

This criterion considers a project’s impact on species/habitats in relation to the collective influence of other on-going or planned activities related to those species and habitats. An example of a **major** benefit would be a planning/outreach project that is working in conjunction with a larger comprehensive effort (e.g. writing a Conceptual Area Protection Plan as part of a regional conservation strategy, conducting outreach in conjunction with a captive breeding/reintroduction or restoration effort). A **moderate** benefit would be a planning/outreach project that works in conjunction with other more moderate (or fewer) ongoing efforts; and a **minimal** benefit would be a project that is more or less working in isolation and would not be complemented by other on-going efforts.

Long-term Benefit

This criterion is used distinguish between projects that will contribute to a lasting positive effect on species and habitats, as opposed to projects that will result in only a short term gain and that will not “carry over” into future years. A **major** long term benefit would be a plan that outlines

permanent, long term strategies (e.g. land acquisition/restoration) applied to an area considered important to species recovery. A **moderate** benefit would be a planning effort that does not include any significant and/or permanent changes affecting species and only slightly changes current practices. A minor benefit would be a planning effort that fails to address core issues related to species recovery, and therefore would have little effect on the status of the species over the long term. For outreach projects, a **major**, **moderate** or **minimal** benefit would be determined by assessing to what extent the outreach effort would continue to affect public awareness over time, or whether the impact of the outreach is relatively short-lived.

Partners

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Level of CVP Impacts

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Project Urgency

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Technical Merit and Completeness of Proposal

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion

CP/HRP Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Cost

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.

Total Points

Use guidance for Acquisition Projects to rank this criterion.